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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: KEMEROVO'S POLITICAL OPPOSITION FINDS LITTLE
TRACTION IN LEAD-UP TO REGIONAL ELECTIONS

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Alice Wells for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In Kemerovo Oblast, no party can muster a viable opposition to United Russia's (ER) stranglehold on local politics. Led by charismatic governor Aman Tuleyev, ER holds a supermajority in the regional parliament that likely will grow in the upcoming October 12 elections. Liberal parties and the Communist Party (KPRF) barely register in the region, while LDPR and Just Russia are left to fight each other over any votes that may push them over the 7 percent electoral threshold. On September 30, KPRF filed an official complaint against Tuleyev in response to what they call his illegal "anti-communist propaganda." Voter turnout is expected to reach 65 percent. End Summary.

Liberals Founder, Communists Sue To Remain Afloat

¶2. (C) Liberal political opposition is nearly non-existent in Kemerovo region. The Union of Right Forces (SPS), the region's only liberal party of note, has been unable to muster public support and speaks primarily through its affiliation with local independent newspaper Nasha Gazeta. The paper's editor, Dmitriy Shagiakhmetov, doubles as the region's SPS head, and even he acknowledged that daily readership is no more than 2,000-3,000. Liberal opposition parties have no access to television or radio, Shagiakhmetov lamented in a September 22 meeting, and internet outreach does not produce results. Despite his limited reach, Shagiakhmetov nonetheless considers his party, along with ER and KPRF, to be one of only three "real" parties in Kemerovo.

¶3. (C) KPRF State Duma Deputy Nina Ostanina acknowledged that her party has lost substantial prestige since popular Kemerovo governor Aman Tuleyev switched affiliation from KPRF to ER. Still, on September 23 Ostanina preferred to look to a future when "voters will see that (United Russia) did not deliver" on its promises and as a result return to KPRF. On September 30, according to a Kommersant article, KPRF in Kemerovo filed an official complaint against Tuleyev for what KPRF deemed the governor's illegal campaigning against Communists while using administrative resources. Specifically, KPRF alleged, Tuleyev "spread information damaging the honor, dignity, and business reputation" of his opponents. KPRF's Ostanina told media that she recognized that the complaint will not change the electoral outcome, but she hoped it will "reduce or terminate anti-communist propaganda." (Note: This latest legal row is clearly a response to a lawsuit that Tuleyev in February brought against KPRF's national leader, Gennadiy Zyuganov. Zyuganov had publicly accused the governor and Kemerovo authorities of "flagrantly violating the law" and of arresting and beating KPRF members. A court ruled then that Zyuganov had to pay Tuleyev 18,000USD for "damaging (the governor's) honor, dignity, and business reputation." End Note.)

¶4. (C) Kemerovo University political scientist Sergey

Biryukov told us September 22 that ER, Just Russia (SR), and LDPR are the only "real parties in Kemerovo." KPRF, he noted, is "in crisis" and retains no relevance today. Biryukov summarized SPS's marginal status by explaining that "they never had resonance with miners or industrial workers."

Upcoming Opposition Conferences

15. (C) Shagiakhmetov told us that an October 25 regional conference of liberal democratic opposition will take place in Kemerovo, to which representatives from Altai Krai also have been invited. The results of this conference, Shagiakhmetov noted, would help to inform a national democratic opposition conference planned for December 13 in Moscow.

Just Russia and LDPR Predict Bright Futures For Themselves

16. (C) In a September 23 meeting, Just Russia leader Yelena Yamshchikova repeatedly emphasized SR's youth in the region, boasting that in just two years the party had made dramatic progress in attracting new members. The next four years, she predicted, would bring political successes, social change, and popular support for SR. Yamshchikova described her party as "constructive opposition" to ER, but regional leaders of KPRF, SPS, and LDPR all told us that they could see no meaningful difference between ER and SR. Questioning SR's role in the opposition, LDPR head Vladimir Bunkin scoffed that SR "does not have a plan" and is inseparable from ER. Political scientist Sergey Biryukov agreed, adding that in Kemerovo "SR tries to attach itself to ER to move

its program forward," but their ability to gain influence on political and economic conditions "depends entirely on its relationship with ER."

17. (C) LDPR leaders were optimistic regarding prospects in future elections. "The government is corrupt," and "there are not enough smart and competent people in the government" for ER to maintain its stranglehold on Kemerovo politics, noted LDPR's Bunkin in a September 23 meeting. Primarily old people vote for KPRF, Bunkin observed, and as they die off votes will accrue to LDPR since it attracts more young voters.

October 12 Elections Expected To Be United Russia Landslide

18. (C) All observers agreed that ER will win a supermajority in the region's October 12 parliamentary elections. Thirty-six seats are being contested by the four State Duma parties, since SPS and the Party of Peace and Unity were excluded by electoral authorities for what were deemed irregularities in submitted petition signatures. Professor Biryukov estimated that ER will win 30 of the 36 seats, with SR and LDPR splitting the remaining seats. SR's Yamshchikova estimated that her party would win 10-12 percent of the vote.

LDPR's Bunkin estimated that his party would take 14 percent. KPRF State Duma Deputy predicted that the Communists would take 7-8 percent. Sergey Reutov, chairman of the region's electoral commission, predicted a 65 percent voter turnout for the election, down from 72 percent for the March presidential election.

19. (C) Comment: United Russia continues to dominate Kemerovo politics, leaving other parties to fight for scraps in hopes of winning any seats in the regional parliament. Non-ER parties recognize the impossibility of cutting into ER's base, so they instead must look to poach each other's votes. Further illustrating ER's strength is how both KPRF and LDPR prefer to look far into the future, by which time the Communists hope miners will return to KPRF, and LDPR hopes that all the Communists will have died off. The minuscule presence of any political opposition, aside from SR's straw man "constructive opposition," ensures that even State Duma parties will be marginalized. Accordingly, October 12 will be less a referendum on ER than a commentary on the region's

neutered and fractious opposition.
BEYRLE